

Deepwater Capability Replacement Project

The Coast Guard deepwater cutter silently carves a stiletto-like track across the oceans' surface. Ensign John Holler and the cutters' law-enforcement boarding team stand ready on the boat deck awaiting a signal from the bridge to raise the cutters stern hatches and launch their jet-drive pursuit boat to intercept and board a go-fast boat laden with cocaine. Their night vision/thermal-imagery goggles identify the suspect vessel while it is still 10 miles away shrouded in darkness.

Unbeknownst to the smugglers, their every move has been documented and relayed in real time to the cutters information center via an unmanned aerial vehicle, silently keeping watch overhead. The cutters' commanding officer uses this information to position her vessel directly in the path of the unsuspecting smugglers while also vectoring both a helicopter and a boarding team to the target. When the smugglers are still miles from the cutter, it turns its lights on while, at the same time, the helicopter energizes its spotlight.

The boarding teams from the cutter race across the sea in their quick watercraft and arrive at the go-fast" within moments. Before the smugglers know what to do they find themselves face to face with the ensign. He exercises his law-enforcement authority and places them under arrest while other boarding team members use a hand held ionic spectrometer to confirm that the bales contain cocaine. This information, coupled with digital video recorded of the seizure, will be used in court to convict the smugglers.

Pure fiction of the distant future? No. This is the reality of today's threats to America and tomorrow's U.S. Coast Guard. To get there, the Service has put in place the most ambitious acquisition project in its 210-year history. The Coast Guard's deepwater project is designed to replace its obsolescent and aging fleet of major cutters, aircraft, sensors, and command-and-control systems for the Service's deepwater operating areas. A project so important and crucial to America's maritime safety and security that it has become the Coast Guard's number-one modernization priority.

Deepwater missions typically require an extended, continuous presence at sea; the ability to operate in severe environments; and often occur more than 50 miles from shore.

While innovative in many areas, a



The Coast Guard tested the MH-90 Enforcer helicopter and the Over-the-Horizon Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat which is specifically designed to encounter the "go-fast" drug smuggling boat. Here they are with the CGC Gallatin (WHEC 721).



CGC Harriet Lane (WMEC 903) (left) and CGC Northland (WMEC 904) along with other medium endurance cutters moored at the Integrated Support Command in Portsmouth, Va. The Harriet Lane and Northland are multi-mission medium endurance cutters responsible for a variety of Coast Guard missions including search and rescue, enforcement of laws and treaties, national defense, and protection of the marine environment.